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7 June 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy to the DCI for the Intelligence Community

SUBJECT : Organization and Function of the Strategic Warning Staff

1. The Strategic Warning Staff (SWS) by DCID No. 1/5 has two basic functions--first, to study warning indicators of hostile military action against the US by the USSR, China, and North Korea, and second, to give warning of such action. The SWS is well suited to accomplish the first function by virtue of the make-up of its interagency staff and its position within the intelligence community. But, the SWS is not equipped, nor does it operate, in a manner which enables it to give strategic warning of hostilities.

2. Strategic warning is a function and responsibility of the entire intelligence community. If the President is not warned of a hostile action which occurs, the community--not any one agency or staff--has failed. The warning function and the heavy responsibility that goes with it cannot, by any stretch of institutional charters or internetting of directorships, be made the principal duty of a surrogate staff, however talented and dedicated its members might be. The SWS has only about a dozen analysts. It does not work weekends or maintain a 24-hour watch. It does not receive all of the available intelligence reporting needed to give warning of hostilities.

3. Underlying the SWS charter is the presumption that a small staff which focuses on the warning problem is insurance against the possibility, however slim, that the community either will not perceive or will fail to report indicators of hostilities against the US. This is unrealistic and certainly unwarranted by the history of past crises. The problem has never

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been one of failure to recognize a growing threat of hostilities (e.g., the Czech crisis 1968) but rather the interpretation of the indicators. Yet, when it comes to interpretation, the SWS is no more qualified or gifted (in fact, it may be less so) than the best and most experienced brains in the community. The conclusion is clear: the SWS cannot do a better job at warning than the community as a whole, and the charter of the SWS should be changed to relieve it of that responsibility.

4. In my opinion, the SWS should be developed as the intelligence community's Center for the Study of Warning Intelligence. Because it reports directly to the DCI, the SWS should be funded through the DCI's separate budget and should be allocated analyst slots accountable to the DCI and not to any agency. This arrangement would encourage agencies to assign analysts to the SWS for longer periods of time since analysts assigned to the SWS could be replaced and scheduled research need not be postponed.

5. Moreover, as a Center for the Study of Warning Intelligence, the SWS could operate with a smaller staff. Its functions would be mainly three-fold:

- To identify issues and problems of warning intelligence by analyzing, for example, the warning potential of new collection systems and by critiquing the warning processes in past crises;
- To initiate and manage interagency studies of these issues either by setting up ad hoc working groups or soliciting contributions to papers to be written by SWS staff members. In this way the SWS could more effectively exploit the community's expertise, drawing on specialists who are not now available to the SWS because their parent agencies consider them indispensable.
- To communicate the results of these studies through articles in a quarterly SWS journal (vice the present monthly and weekly issuances) or by publication of special SWS reports.

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-- If need be, the present weekly Alert List could be continued by drawing on current intelligence publication and tasking individual offices for inputs.

6. Because these functions parallel in many respects those of a National Intelligence Officer, consideration might be given to designating the director of the SWS as the NIO for Strategic Warning. This would place the study of warning intelligence on a par with other priority substantive concerns of the intelligence community and ensure that the warning implications of significant events are considered at the national level.

7. Under this concept the SWS could provide the community a unique and valuable service not now being performed by any agency. I am sending copies of this memorandum to Bill Parmenter and [redacted] and recommend that this matter be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of the Strategic Warning Review Group.

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Acting Deputy Director  
Strategic Research

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